

THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF
ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS
(Section of the Library Association)


HON. EDITOR: T. I. M. CLULOW
(Leeds City Libraries)

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Announcements

THE next meeting of the Section is to be held at 6.30 p.m. on 19th May in the Isleworth Branch Library by kind invitation of the Heston and Isleworth Libraries Committee and their Librarian, Mr. H. Groom, F.L.A. The building is a new one and should well repay inspection. Mr. C. P. Willard (East Sussex County Library) will address the meeting on "Culture and the public library," and as he has been nominated by the South-Eastern Division as this session's guest-speaker, it is hoped that there will be a fittingly large attendance to do honour to our visitor.

Mr. H. Groom, F.L.A., Chief Librarian of Heston-Isleworth, will take the chair, and has kindly invited all members to take tea with him at 5.30 p.m. Will all those intending to be present send their names to W. C. Pugsley, Branch Library, High Road, Chadwell Heath, not later than 15th May.

Isleworth Branch Library is in Twickenham Road and can be reached by the following routes :

(a) Train to Hammersmith, thence No. 667 trolley-bus to door.

(b) 657 trolley-bus from Shepherd's Bush to Kew Bridge, thence by No. 667 trolley-bus.

The Annual General Meeting of the A.A.L. will be held at Cardiff on Wednesday, 16th June, 1937. The business is likely to include items of grave importance, and we would therefore urge all who can possibly make the journey to attend. An attractive programme has been arranged for the entertainment of visitors, who will be given a Civic Reception and Lunch by the Lord Mayor, after which there will be a tour of the city by motor-coach. Tea will be provided by the hospitality of the Libraries Committee prior to the Annual Meeting, which on all counts promises to be one of the most memorable in the long history of the A.A.L.

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ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

The Annual Meeting of Members of the Library Association will be held in the Spa Grand Hall, Scarborough, on Wednesday, 2nd June, 1937, at 2.15 p.m.

(Signed) P. S. J. WELSFORD, Secretary.

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AGENDA

1. Minutes of previous Annual Meeting, held in Margate on 10th June, 1936.
2. To receive the Annual Report of the Council, including the Report of the Honorary Treasurer and of the Honorary Auditors.
3. To nominate and elect for the year 1937 two Honorary Auditors (who, in accordance with Bye-law C.4, may not be members of the Council).
4. To receive the Report of the Council on State Aid and Control of Public Libraries, as circulated to all members on 13th February, 1937, and printed on page 99 of *The Library Association Record*, March, 1937.

Motion by the Honorary Secretary, on behalf of the Council, that the Report be approved and adopted.

Amendment by Mr. A. H. Gillgrass, F.L.A. :

"That the Report of the Council of the Library Association on State Aid and Control of Public Libraries, which was circulated by the Secretary on 13th February, 1937, be referred back to the Council, with a recommendation that they present, after consideration of the question in greater detail, a more comprehensive report to the Annual Meeting of the Association in 1938."

5. *Motion* by the Ilford Borough Council :

"That this Conference is of the opinion that the amounts at present allowed by way of commission on the purchase of new books under the terms of the Book Agents' Licence of 1929 are now inadequate, and requests the Council of the Library Association to approach the Publishers' Association and the Associated Booksellers of Great Britain and Ireland with the object of opening negotiations for a new agreement based upon terms more favourable to Public Library Authorities."

6. *Motion* by Dundee Public Libraries Committee :

"That the Council of the Library Association strives to secure a 25 per cent. discount off all new books subject to discount instead of the present 10 per cent."

7. *Motion* by Gateshead Public Libraries Committee :

"The Conference has considered the present cost of books in relation to the pre-war prices. It is noticed that the general price of newly published novels is 7s. 6d., and in many cases where the author is well established the price is 8s. 6d. and as high as 10s. 6d. Books of travel range from 18s. upwards, and biographies and reminiscences

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are at what seems a standard price of 30s. Against this the issue of 2s. 6d. and 3s. 6d. reprints of books, mostly inferior though popular novels, is growing, which leads to the belief that the cost of material and production is not the cause of the high prices.

"All libraries would prefer to provide their borrowers with outstanding books new from the press, but many of them and numbers of the general book-buying public are forced to wait six months until they can purchase at second-hand prices these better-class novels, works of history, biography, and travel. This cannot be good either for the bookselling trade, the publishers, libraries, or the reading public.

"This conference is of opinion that the publishers could well afford to make a substantial reduction so as to bring prices more in accordance with pre-war standards."

8. *Motion* by Mr. J. P. Lamb :

"That the operation of the Revised Examination Syllabus be postponed from 1st January, 1938, to 1st January, 1940, and that the Council be instructed to prepare a syllabus in which no age-limits are fixed for any Examinations conducted by the Association and in which the maximum service period for all such examinations shall not exceed three years."

9. To receive an invitation to hold the Annual Conference in Portsmouth and Southsea, from 13th to 17th June, 1938, extended by Councillor J. C. Juniper, representing the Public Libraries Committee, Portsmouth.

10. To express the thanks of the Association to the Corporation of Scarborough and to all those who have facilitated the work of the Conference.



Mr. Welsford also asks us to draw attention to the fact that organized parties of assistants may attend the Conference for one day only, without fee ; but organizers of such parties must send him a list of the members making up the party *at once*. Failure to do so may cause difficulty in getting in, as the Spa buildings and grounds are private property, with a rather heavy admission fee.

The Librarian as Bookman¹

F. SEYMOUR SMITH

THE title of my paper may appear to be tautological. The Librarian as Bookman? Has a doctor ever been known to read a paper entitled "The Doctor as physician," or a dentist to speak on "The Dentist as extractor of teeth"? A librarian by the nature of his work, and as his calling signifies, *is* a bookman, or rather, *must* be a bookman if he is to be a real librarian. The necessity for the alternative phrasing justifies my choice of title.

In the days when there was little of technical librarianship and little money to spend on books there seems to have been more literary knowledge amongst librarians than there is now. Those, too, were the days of small pay and no pay. Now, when our pay is better and our hours are shorter, many of us seem to have lost our personal contact with the insides of books. Can we trace any connexion between these facts? Perhaps librarians found that a scholarly knowledge of literature and of books did not meet with its just reward. True it is that many of those who employ us, even members of our own committees, know so little of books and avoid them so successfully throughout their careers that they have no conception of what bookmanship really is. In fact, many committee-men quite definitely are afraid of books, and their fear takes many strange shapes. Even literary men themselves have sometimes failed to appreciate the value of a real librarian. In my private library I have an old calf copy of Sprat's quarto collection of Cowley. One of the odd items which will no doubt interest you as much as it does me is a reprint of Cowley's *Proposition for the advancement of experimental philosophy*. In the scheme which he draws up therein for the establishment of a philosophical college he advises that the company to be received shall consist, in order of importance, of twenty philosophers, sixteen young scholars, a chaplain, a bailey, a manciple, two gardeners, a master-cook, an under-cook, a butler, an under-butler, a surgeon, two lungs, or chymical servants, and a librarian, who is likewise to be apothecary, druggist, and keeper of instruments, engines, etc. A keeper of beasts, a groom, a messenger, and four old women, end the list of those who were to give their time to research into the world of ideas. I don't

¹ A revision of a paper read at the January 1937 meeting of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Division of the A.A.L. Section.

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mind the librarian having to be apothecary, druggist, *and* keeper of instruments, engines, etc., as well as of books, but I think we can all fairly object to being placed so low down in the learned hierarchy. Let philosophers have their master-cooks, and their under-cooks, and their butlers, gardeners, and four old women by all means, but a poet, even a mediocre one, should certainly have found a place for us no lower than after the chaplain. Cowley made some amends for his fault when he came down to the financial side of his attractive scheme. True, the professors and the chaplain were to receive £120 per annum, the scholars £20 (£10 for diet and £10 for entertainment), and the librarian only £30. But this did at least place him financially on a level with the manciple and surgeon, and even the bailey (if you do not reckon his travelling allowance). Moreover, the librarian was to be paid no less than three times the salary of the butler and £10 more than the master-cook. The four necessary women, by the way, were to receive £10 each.

So we have a bad tradition behind us of plurality of jobs, inadequate salaries, and poorly appreciated ability when compared with the important place accorded some other professional workers. The tendency to-day is to depart from the scale of values common to the last and the preceding centuries. Then a man or woman was accorded a high place in public estimation and in the general scale of things according to his birth, wealth, special knowledge and performance, in that order. To-day the order is, generally speaking, wealth, special knowledge and performance, and birth. We call the person with special knowledge of a subject an expert, and it cannot be denied that the expert to-day is recognized as such and receives the real respect of society and the State, provided that his subject is one of importance to the community. Because of this, I suggest that there is everything to be gained, and nothing lost, by the librarian who can succeed in making himself into a real specialist in the subject of books as well as in the keeping of them. If in addition he can become a special specialist on one small subject in literature, I think he will find the personal reward greater.

But, you may say, the modern librarian does have to pass a stiff examination in literary history, either for his degree or for his diploma. He does, but this study and the resultant certification do not make him into a bookman, and the detached cramming necessary for the passing of examinations does not produce experts, or, to use the preferable term, specialists. I say *detached* cramming because studying a subject for an examination is

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quite divorced from the student's individual reaction to and critical appreciation of that subject.

This leads me direct to the need for a definition of the term "a bookman" as I shall use it throughout this paper. The librarian-bookman is something more than a keeper of books. He is a keeper with an extensive knowledge of all literature of cultural value, an intensive knowledge of the great literature of his own country, and a working knowledge of technical literature and of books which are not books. He must have a critical appreciation of literature, a deep love and affection for books, a connoisseur's knowledge and appreciation of some small field of literature, a delight in the personal ownership of as many books as his purse, house, and mother, landlady, or wife, will allow him to own, and a never-failing curiosity about new books, new writers, new fashions, new experiments, and new obscurities. Better, too, if he has strong personal prejudices, and is able to express these in provocative forthright language, for without this Johnsonian attribute your bookman is a poor thing to spend a bookish evening with: a mere encyclopædia, an annoying know-all on whom good conversation is wasted. Two of the most prejudiced critics of English literature, the two Georges—Saintsbury and Moore—are also the most delightful of critics, although not the best. Saintsbury was, of course, by reason of his knowledge, affection for books, and racy prejudices, the English bookman raised to the *n*th power.

I spoke of the personal ownership of books. Perhaps there are some who consider it superfluous for a librarian to buy books. I am afraid there will be. No more false notion was ever conceived. The librarian's personal library is the most important factor in his literary education. I would have every librarian possess at least one room full of books of his own choosing. True, as I have hinted, there are usually domestic difficulties in the way. Mothers or wives have to be persuaded that at the lowest estimate books are decorative and economical, in that a book-room requires little else to furnish it adequately. Chairs, not more than two, preferably, plenty of ash-trays, and a pipe-rack, and maybe a small cupboard for glasses, etc. (Remember, as a distinguished bibliographer said to me some years ago, remember the traditional connexion between a book and a bottle.) Have your book-room as far away from the radio receiver as you can, and shelve all available wall space from floor to ceiling; fill the shelves with the thousand books which every sensible bookman would wish to take with him to his desert island, and what more can you

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want, except more money to move into a larger house and buy more books?

You will see from what I have said that I consider a knowledge of books to be the most important quality of a librarian. Is there any other which can challenge it for pride of place? Nobody will advance a knowledge of book classification, I know, for beyond its simple outlines that subject is nothing but a fascinating pastime; nobody will speak up for cataloguing, I know, too, for difficult and important as this subject is, far more important, let it be stated, than classification, the cataloguer's art is obviously secondary in the library hierarchy. The good cataloguing of bad books is a waste of time; as if, for instance, Beecham or Toscanini were to conduct "The music goes round and round." Before you can obtain a library of good books to catalogue, you must find a good bookman-librarian to buy them for you.

It is obvious that the only quality which can seriously challenge the priority of bookmanship is business capacity, or dynamic personality, call it what you wish, but you know what I mean. For there's no denying that the practical man of affairs has a knack of getting things done and of getting his own way with a speed and efficiency which leaves many a plodding bookman far behind. Yet at the same time it must be argued that if the library is lucky enough to have as its principal such a man of affairs, who cannot also be termed a bookman, then somewhere on the staff there must be an expert on books. Further, he must be made full use of. And the practical man of affairs would belie his title if he did not find someone to do for him what he could not do well himself. In any case, these dynamic personalities are not common in any field of work, and certainly not in ours. You can learn the art of being a bookman, but not that of being a personality. Not yet: psychological discovery may some day help everybody to develop his personality to the fullest degree; but by then, no doubt, all persons suspected of being psychologists will be placed in concentration camps, where as slaves in the service of some demented dictator, they will either agree to use their science to make us all emotionally dotty, or they will themselves painfully disappear.

Considering well all these things, therefore, only leads us to our first conclusion, that a knowledge of books, in normal circumstances, is a pre-eminent virtue in every librarian. This is particularly true of those who work in small and medium-sized libraries. The management of very large systems brings with it special problems with which I will not deal now.

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If I myself had any doubts on this subject, and I had, they disappeared on my recent survey. For I found a number of libraries in my area suffering from most of the defects from which a library can suffer, which yet filled one with a respect for them and their librarians. The buildings were poor; the catalogues were inadequate; the classification was haphazard; but the libraries were obviously doing good work and their librarians were respected by the readers. A glance round the shelves, and a chat with the librarians, made clear the reason for this. The librarian was a bookman and what little money he did have to spend was spent on real books. The librarian would know all his readers and would be in effect a teacher, an educator, as well as a keeper of books. What some of these little towns owe to their librarians nobody in authority will ever acknowledge, because it is unlikely they will ever realize it. Most of these officials may not have been able to pass an examination in classification and cataloguing, but with all their progressive and technical shortcomings they were true librarians. I left their libraries with regret that I could not stay longer. How different were my feelings on going into the same type of library building and finding therein no bookman, and, inevitably, no books. Some newly appointed librarians, too, confirmed my opinion. One would say, "The place was dead and buried when I came. Yes, it's a decent little building, but heavens above, you should have seen the books, I longed for a fire." Another would say, "Well, the old boy, like the building, had his faults, but the books were fine. There just wasn't enough of them." I am reminded of the journalist who recently visited tragic Spain, and on going to a village library found there were no books on the shelves at all. "This is a queer library," he said to the village librarian. "How so?" replied the librarian. "Well, I've seen heaps of books piled up because there's been no library to house them, but this is the first library I've seen without any books." "Oh, we've got the books all right," was the reply, "but they're all out." I suppose this would be the ideal public library: all the books would be good, and all the readers (100 per cent. of the population) so intelligent that everybody would take it in turn to read the entire stock.

Having spoken of the pleasures of the bookman and of his value to the librarian, I should now say something about the dangers and perils. There are some who would have the librarian no more interested in the contents of books than the least literary minded member of his public. Such persons either take Mark Pattison's joke seriously or, I suspect, use it as a justification for their inherent lack of interest in books. A form of snobbishness has

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sprung up; if you wish to belong to this club, you boast of having no taste above the ordinary man's, a mythical standard at the best; you declare on all occasions in a suitably loud voice and with the slight smile of the self-satisfied that you can always enjoy a good yarn—something clean and bright; you say you can't stand this clever stuff, and lest there should be any doubt make it quite clear that there's nothing highbrow about you. At the same time you recognize that there are one or two authors of repute who unaccountably seem to have pleased even what is termed the general public for a number of centuries. What is to be done about these? Must one really wade through all this dreary, clever, highbrow stuff? Certainly not! Swift has reminded us that in these circumstances all we have to do is to emulate those who would like to hob-nob with noblemen but whose overtures are snubbed; "learn their titles and then boast of their acquaintance."

This anxiety of large sections of the community to prove that they are not highbrows, is confined, so far as I know, to the English-speaking races. Only a few weeks ago, M. Paul Morand, writing in *Figaro*, complained bitterly of the literary fare offered him in a certain famous British liner. He found on board, he says, good food, good wine, excellent furniture, good service, and all the other good things of life which the intelligent man expects to get if he can afford to pay for luxury trips across the Atlantic. All, I said. No, all but one—good books. What an unaccountable thing it is, says this writer, that the English race, who possess probably the greatest literature in the world, should endeavour to hide the best books their native genius has given the world! He examined the catalogue of the ship's library, and although it was not perhaps quite so shockingly revealing as the catalogues of some London libraries which have recently received publicity in the press, it was certainly pretty bad. M. Morand benevolently assumed that the persons responsible for the book selection were aware of the literary tastes of intelligent people, but considered that *en voyage* everybody went temporarily nit-wit and would not venture beyond the detective novel, or at best the work of writers of the Wodehouse-Buchan-Frankau type. The real reason was probably that the ship's librarian had been well-inoculated with the anti-highbrow virus and knew too well that only very extraordinary "arty" people could possibly be seen reading anything other than the latest thriller or candid autobiography. There would, no doubt, be hundreds of passengers on board who would criticize the book selection much as the French journalist did. In other words, the ship's librarian had done what

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so many landlubbers of the same profession are doing throughout their careers; he had underrated the intelligence of his public. This is indeed a common fault with many public institutions and officials, for somehow or other the anti-highbrows always seem to be more ready than the civilized sections of the community to voice their likes and dislikes. Whatever the drawbacks of bookmanship may be then, they cannot be as deplorable in their results as those arising from the application of the flabby principles of the lowbrow.

The chief danger which besets the scholar and the person who is intently interested in books, is that of immersion, submersion, and detachment. The picture of the bespectacled scholar poring over books, aloof from the living world and its problems, is a familiar one. He will linger sentimentally in our minds long after he becomes rarer than he is. The type may still be fairly numerous in donnish circles, but that I do not know. What I do know is that it is seldom one finds a representative of the species in the library world of to-day. The reason is to me an obvious one, and it embodies what I consider to be the best thing which results from intimate contact with a good public library—the close contact one gets with the living world of to-day. One is enabled moreover to perceive with some clarity the dead tissue which exists on the surface of much of our life. One may even help in the sloughing process and enable the new idea to face the wind of criticism and the test of application. For let us make no mistake here: humanity clings to outworn creeds and beliefs which have outlived their usefulness, as strongly as a dog clings to a meatless bone; and growls as much, too, if attempts are made to wrest those creeds from it. That is why books are so valuable to the thinking man. The physical struggle implied by the forcible imposition of ideas is abhorrent to all civilized people. But the expression of reasoned opinion in print, however much it may shock at first, will, if it is valid and useful, eventually permeate enough of humanity to move the world. To return to our dog; everyone knows that there are only two ways of making him drop the useless bone which may kill him: you either pull his tail and risk a bite, or you offer another and more tempting dish with one hand while you take the old bone away with the other. The dictator's method is to pull humanity's tail with one hand and to clip a muzzle on its mouth with the other. But the writer quietly puts before us his own meaty dish and allows the natural appetite for knowledge and discussion to do the rest.

The librarian who reads and knows enough of the vital contents of the

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literature of yesterday and to-day keeps his fingers on the world's pulse, as few other men can. If he cannot do that, he is not the expert he should be in his responsible position. A man returns from a ten-years' residence abroad and asks for a reading list of fifty vital modern books which, as an intelligent reader, he would have read if he had been near towns with their bookshops and libraries; a countryman who cannot go to plays asks for an annual reading list of the really important plays which he would have seen if he had lived in a great city. How can a librarian perform these duties (of which these are but two examples) if he does not himself take a living interest in books and the world he lives in? I say it is impossible to do these things except you be a bookman.

I know of some librarians who will accuse me of advocating an academic approach to our work; who will even accuse me of priggishness and intellectual snobbery. They will say that the result of such an attitude to librarianship will be the neglect of the industrial, technical, scientific, and commercial aspects of our work. I will forestall that criticism by this assertion: that the danger of such neglect is not likely to occur with a real bookman in charge of a library, unless that bookman happens also to be really learned. Learned scholarship implies a considerable degree of specialized research. This must of necessity bring with it isolation and lack of interest in the general variety of our work.

You may remember Mr. Savage's suggestion that the book selection in libraries of the future will be done, or should be done, by specialists whose work will be centralized. A very statesmanlike suggestion, and one which is likely to bear fruit when we have the means to train our specialists, for I take it Mr. Savage would wish this work to be done as far as possible by working librarians. Already many of the larger libraries are using ASLIB's technical list as a means of selecting worthy books in science and technology. The ASLIB publication is prepared, I hope, with the help of the librarians of technical institutes, business firms, and science libraries, as well as by practical scientists and technicians. The co-operation of these two classes is important. A short time ago the librarian of a large city told me he had submitted a list of intended purchases in a special field of literature to an outside expert. The expert rejected one particular book which was comparatively costly, stating that it was of little value. Nevertheless, the librarian bought the book because of his knowledge of the author's previous work, the publisher, and the general reception of the work in the more reliable journals. In other words, he bought the book because of his belief in his own bookman-

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ship. The sequel is amusing. Some months later, the expert, forgetting that he had adjudicated on the book's value, applied at the library for this very work, and was pleased to learn that it was in stock.

Mr. Lamb a short while ago seemed to have grave fears about the bookish approach to library work. In a paper read at Sheffield on "Books and the public library"—afterwards printed in *THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT*—he singles me out for chastisement. Mr. Lamb complained that too many librarians regarded the library as primarily a literary institution, and expressed some pain at discovering "alarming symptoms" of this view "in a quarter where one would have least expected it." That quarter was *THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT* in the days when, according to Mr. Lamb, that lively publication used to appear "with a bilious green cover which revolted the soul." I was responsible for the journal in those days and in fact was particularly fond and proud of that green, which, it is interesting to recall, was so much admired by a very distinguished Editor whose name and publications are known to you all, that he wrote to the A.A.L. asking for our source of supply. But that is by the way. To return to our muttons, or rather our lamb, this librarian's chief complaint referred to the state of mind of assistants who could, in the 1930's, seriously suggest that "literature, and modern literature at that, should be the basic element of the stock of any self-respecting library." He shuddered at "the spectacle of the youth of the movement joining hands with the older school in advocating a philosophy of librarianship which," in his opinion, "is completely reactionary." Mr. Lamb is never happy unless he is knocking something down. Mr. Lamb is always happy. But in order to maintain this enviable state of beatitude he sometimes has to knock down things which have never stood up. Excellent exercise, but too metaphysical to be of much practical use. In this case neither the symptoms nor the disease existed. You may examine the files of *THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT* in its green days, and indeed in its perilous yellow days, too, and fail to find anything to support Mr. Lamb's case. I know the stock of many representative libraries, and not one within my knowledge shows any sign of being overbalanced on the modern literary side. Far from it. But although I agree with Mr. Lamb that the workshop, laboratory, and information sections of a library's stock are of first-rate importance and should receive very careful attention, I would not agree with his implication that the creative literature of all ages must not be the *basic* element. This large class includes everything of permanent value to the mind of man. Now surely the *basis* of a public library should be the

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things of permanent value, from which other classes may be built up. To over-emphasize the information side of the work of public libraries is a fault, and I think Mr. Lamb's ruthlessly unsentimental attitude to his work prevents him from seeing this. At the same time he must not exaggerate to prove his point, for exaggeration is a form of sentimentality. I fancy Mr. Lamb meant that creative literature must not be regarded as the only really important section of stock, and with this opinion none of us would disagree. It is so obviously true that there was scarcely need to state the fact.

As a matter of fact, in my own experience, I find that those librarians who are keenly interested in literature and are real bookmen, are just as excited about the discovery and acquisition of good books in the technical and applied scientific classes as in those of pure literature. The atmosphere of a good library and the training in library work seem to make one sensitive to quality in a book whether one is personally interested in its subject or not. The awareness of the virtue of a really first-rate book, even if we never intend to read it, is an essential and exciting factor in the daily work of the librarian. Watch carefully next time you see a bookman-librarian handle a first-class book. Binding, format, title-page, publisher, all will be examined with the relish that M. André Simon reserves for 1830 Cognac. Something of the quality of the book, even in a ten-minute handling of it, will have passed into his consciousness. A little more knowledge will be tucked away in his brain, ready for use when needed.

I myself find that the learning of the importance of certain books on subjects about which I have no personal curiosity is tremendously exciting. To cite one of hundreds of examples: some years ago a great amateur gardener, whose word on the subject is authoritative, wrote that "Dr. Forbes Watson's book on *Flowers and gardens* was little known," and that he regarded it "as one of the finest and wisest works in the literature of the garden." The instinct which most of us, as librarians, possess, made me automatically note this and ferret out of the files of the *English catalogue* the particulars of the book. As it was published as far back as 1872, I have never yet come across a copy, but when I do, depend upon it, I shall be as excited as I was on the day when I found a copy of Gilbert and Churchill's *Dolomite mountains* in a secondhand bookshop. Yet on the former subject, gardening, I have not the slightest personal interest, but the acquisition of the *Dolomite mountains* was a matter of importance to my own pursuits. The value of this remarkable book, by the way, I discovered by reading another book on mountaineering. That grand old climber, Dr. Kugy, in

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his account of his own climbs, with the modesty so characteristic of great climbers, found time to praise this old book in an endeavour to bring it from its undeserved obscurity.

Thus the reading of one good book leads on to the discovery and sometimes the reading of others. This is certainly the most pleasant way of building up a knowledge of books.

You will readily perceive the usefulness of this kind of by-way knowledge. Dr. Watson's book is old and scarce ; if one were overhauling the gardening section of a library possessing it, instead of placing it in the safety of the stackroom, ready for you to recommend to the very person you know requires it, or better still, ready for use when asked for by somebody who already knows of its value, one might in ignorance discard one of the few copies now available.

And so I find wherever I go, on business or on holiday, that book knowledge of the out-of-the-way kind can be picked up. You may be in a country town. You cannot, as a librarian, allow yourself to pass by that attractive looking bookshop. You stay to linger awhile. And there in the window is a locally printed book, almost unknown outside its own locality, on the very subject you have been enquiring into. Such chance encounters are very common in the topographical sections. Some of the best practical books on the country-side, written by walkers, by local men who know their district from end to end, who have trod every pathway, and know every good inn, and, what is more important, every bad one, have been published by local printers, and in all probability have even escaped the keen eye of the British Museum. One such, known in the county of its origin for years, was last year discovered by a London publisher, and given a wider field of fame by re-issue from London. But one gets the thrill of pleasure reserved for pioneers in having had the book in the library for years before.

I have a peculiar love of the little book on a small subject, and for the brilliantly written tract on a large one. It is easy for the author to spin out what he has to say into a crown octavo ; very often both publisher and public force him to do this against his will. Many a bad novel would have made a good short story, and there's more meat in some essays than in many a heavy tome. Incidentally, I may mention that the little book is worth the attention of librarians as well as the general public. Little books are a nuisance in many ways, but so, too, are large ones, and the latter are not excluded by reason of their size. One day I will compile a list of

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worthy *libelli* which justify inclusion in the stock of a public library, and even justify special shelving. There are at least a good round hundred of them; some didactic but inspiring, others merely practical (and yes, Mr. Lamb, even technical!), others brilliantly witty and informative, a few unique in that they deal with subjects which have not yet found fuller treatment.

We have, then, to cultivate an excited interest in all books, big and little, in size and quality, before we can call ourselves bookish librarians. We may agree in heart with Sir William Temple, the husband of the ever-adorable Dorothy Osborne, that "whoever converses much among the old books will be something hard to please among the New"; but we must not forget that even this ancient hastened to add: "yet these [*i.e.*, New Books] must have their part too in the leisure of an idle man, and have many of them, their Beauties as well as their Defaults." Little did Temple know that one day his own wife's delightful letters would themselves be a New Book. The truth is, of course, that this conservative attitude to new books arises from laziness. The "Beauties and Defaults" of Old Books are known to us to a large extent before we ever open them; those of the New Books we must discover for ourselves, and in the discovery will have to wade through much entertaining inferiority. A few living critics are competent to help us in the matter, but only a few. Many who place their trust in newspaper reviewing forget that reviewing is not now the same as criticism, and that the way to the reviewer's desk is not usually by the peak of knowledge, across the valley of experience, into the fair land of competence. Reviewers are tasters, and if their natural tastes are good they have their uses for us all; but beware of accrediting them with the technical equipment of the real critic. This must include knowledge of what has been written before, and a critical standard of values based on intrinsic gifts as an interpreter. How often have not librarians smiled to read a newspaper reviewer's notice of a book in which is stated with ill-founded confidence "this is the only book on such and such a subject," or "this is Mr. So-and-so's first book," or worse still, "this is a new book by Mr. So-and-so," when any librarian worth his salt could have told him that it was merely a reprint. A year or two ago, the sixth book of a very distinguished poet was reviewed in more than one journal as the first book of a new and promising writer. All libraries who took the advice of THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT in its "bilious green" days had books by this author on their shelves. How *can* a reviewer properly assess the need for, and the value of, a new book,

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on, say, the thirteenth century, without being acquainted in some small measure with Dr. Walsh's fine work on that subject? Yet they try to do these things. Hence I am inclined to agree with Mr. Gardner that librarians in the near future must to a certain extent be their own reviewers, particularly if we can train our people along the specialized lines advocated by Mr. Savage.

Talking of my friend Gardner reminds me that when I recently told him of the subject of this paper, he groaned and uttered exclamations of dismay. "Can't you read a useful paper, Seymour?" he asked. "Why, man, you're going right back to the eighteenth century." Well, although the eighteenth century has very great attractions for me, and I certainly do find myself cosily and bookishly at home with Boswell, Lackington, Voltaire, Pope, Walpole, and the rest, I had no intention of inflicting on you a sentimental panegyric on the delights of reading. For one thing, I knew this would not be necessary before the audience I have the honour to address; and further, so many others have done this superlatively well. What I have tried to do is to show how important the subjects of books and bookmanship are to us, and how great and important a part these play in our work. The fear that this paper is entirely useless drives me to ask for a little more of your time to enable me to deal briefly with one of the most important topics of to-day. This day, mark you, not yesterday, nor the days of the eighteenth century. Moreover, I hope to show how closely related this subject is to the main theme of my paper.

The subject I speak of is that which engaged the controversial pens of Messrs. Savage and Munford. You remember: "Questions for Mr. Munford"; "Answers for Mr. Savage." They were arguing on the wisdom, nay the right, of a librarian to advise his committee to place in the public library novels of little or no educational value in order that the library might serve all sections of the community. Mr. Munford somewhat unnecessarily offered an excuse for his action in advising on these lines by stating that the object in view was to encourage as many persons as he could to use his library. He could already proudly point to the fact that more than the average percentage of the population had joined a library of which the advent had aroused many financial misgivings. There is no need for me to enter into the details of this controversy, as both disputants had a good innings themselves. I should like to express my regret, however, that the row was of such little value. Mr. Savage, by indulging in lively exaggeration of Mr. Munford's statements and opinions, forced the

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controversy on to lines which had no stations and no buffers. Nobody who knows Mr. Munford and his library would imagine that he could tolerate for a moment a municipal "shop" library with fiction as its most important class. He is a bookman. He merely states in his article and letters that popular fiction must be provided in popular libraries. He implies that this is a pity, but thinks it has its uses. Mr. Savage suggests that local authorities may eventually deplore this principle and may be urged by ratepayers either to justify it or to discontinue it. Would that this were so ! My own limited experience makes me think that a large proportion of committee-men grumble because too few novels are added to the public libraries they control, and that the majority of ratepayers would be well-pleased if, at least, half the library book grant were spent on popular fiction. This, I suppose, is Mr. Munford's experience too ; hence his defence of a compromise. A compromise, be it emphasized, far removed from the ideal imputed to him : that a public library should " have the same aims as the shop library and have a like stock of books."

Mr. Munford made a casual allusion to drawing the line to indicate a minimum standard. This was the only occasion on which the discussion tended to be useful, but the occasion passed without being used. May I ask Mr. Savage a question. Does he agree that it is next to impossible to run a public municipal library in these days without buying *some* popular modern fiction ? I will assume for the purpose of argument that his answer is " Yes, I do agree ! " Then, I ask, first, what proportion of a book grant do you consider may be reasonably spent on that class ; second, what is the purpose of placing this fiction in the library ; third, where would you draw the line to indicate your minimum standard so that you would be able to follow the ideal of every good librarian, which is to be able to justify the inclusion or exclusion of any given book in your library ?

To quote Mr. Savage, " I have my own answers to these questions, but " (end of quote) *I* am not going to reserve them.

First, as to proportion. It should be no higher than the average in ten or twelve of the best and most respectable public libraries in the country. I do not think this figure would be more than 25 per cent. I leave you to guess why !

Second, as to reason. This is, to my mind, that good fiction, although ephemeral, may be slightly educational ; that it is at least not harmful in a cultural sense ; and that its total exclusion would undoubtedly mean the loss of many readers who gain in the long run by coming into contact with

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really good books of all kinds. Sir Henry Wood at the Queen's Hall Promenade Concerts provided entertainment for London's unmusical public in the 90's by playing second- and third-rate music on the same nights as he played works of real and everlasting quality. The good results have astonished everybody, except Sir Henry, who always knew what they would be. I suggest that the same results may be achieved, and are being achieved, in every good public library of to-day and yesterday.

Third, as to drawing the line. In general, first of all, I say, exclude every English novel which the editors of the *T.L.S.*, the *New Statesman*, *The Spectator*, *Time and tide*, and the few other journals of a similar standard, do not consider worthy of review, or do not receive for review. I say in general, because I want to be precise, and occasionally a good novel may be missed even by these papers. The bookman must be on the lookout for these himself. Having thus narrowed the field, select from what remains according to your kind of public, your purse, and your *flair*, and your public's articulate demands. Finally, buy many copies of the best of those you do buy, if their popularity justifies this. Let the amount you set aside for this class help you to decide how much you can buy new and how much you must buy on the excellent second-hand system adopted at Leeds described at last year's conference.

If Mr. Savage does not agree with this solution of a difficult problem, I hope that instead of asking me questions he will answer mine and his own. There is no doubt that if he does, his answer will be of real value to all of us who would like to see the libraries of Great Britain placed beyond the need for justification.

I said I would show how this problem was intimately connected with the main theme of my paper. Perhaps it is not necessary for me to do so. Lest it should be, I will do so in a few words. Only a bookman can be trusted to deal with the settlement of this question inasmuch as it deals with a question of policy and principle. Any other would not be offended and depressed if he had to waste time on trivial novels of no value whatsoever. Those who *are* offended and depressed must take a hand in giving more than a lip-service to our ideals. You remember Unamuno's magnificently impudent "I am; therefore God is." Let us, too, be impudent with the same grandiose gesture: "The Public Library exists; therefore in this town truth and beauty shall prevail."

The Library Assistant Valuations

STANLEY HOLLIDAY

THE *Library Review* celebrated its tenth birthday by republishing as a brochure the editorial to the January number, together with congratulations from certain august personages. Most discriminating assistants will wish to associate themselves with the compliments paid to Mr. Macleod's venture, since over the past ten years its not too high-falutin literary tone has been refreshing, and its "catholic presentation of views" representing work from the hands of many and various writers has stimulated and guided young and old librarians alike.

In the brochure Mr. Macleod has stressed the attention given in the *Review* to bookmen, bookish knowledge, and bookish librarianship, and claims, perhaps not unjustly, that as a result of the reorientation of thought produced by his "literary" campaign, "the professional education system has been largely reorganized." If it be allowed that the *Review* is so powerful an instrument for changing view-points, then its editor must certainly regard the new examination syllabus as a personal success.

I cannot pass without comment a further remark of Mr. Macleod's to the effect that "there has, in fact, been a complete breakdown of the bad tradition of technical librarianship, which looked upon professional work as an affair of mere routine and display." He noted also the rout, due, it would seem, to the recognition of the importance of bookish librarianship, and the emergence of personal aid to readers, of those "immersed from their youngest days in dull routine, technique, and little world affairs."

Now, we know at what Mr. Macleod is kicking, but the question is, is he kicking from the right angle? I believe his exuberance has led him somewhat astray. Surely there is nothing wrong with technical librarianship if, as a method of administration, it allows itself to be constantly modified by the results of experiment and research? Surely there is nothing wrong with routine if we use the word in its best sense as a mathematically beautiful, efficient, and economical way of doing work? It would seem, whatever glorious vistas are opened by the prospect of hundred-per-cent. bookishness among librarians, that we are only on the threshold of library technique. The examinee may well shudder when he contemplates the activities of the Chicago school, since they reveal potential fields for study (and so for the production of text-books) undreamed of but a short while ago. Statistical examination of the reading habit, the psycho-

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logy of reading itself, the place of the library in the realm of adult education, all these subjects and many more belong solely to technique, yet Mr. Macleod would not call the efforts of Waples, of our own Wellard, of those patient and medal-deserving souls who prepared "Woodside does read," manifestations or resuscitations of a bad tradition. No, "routine" in this land of woe is falsely used as a term to describe a conglomeration of odd jobs, and we feel sure there are gentlemen who would dignify labelling, repair work, date-stamping, and the calculation of coke supplies for a small branch library with the title of technique.

It is against such misuse, such addleheadedness, that Mr. Macleod is inveighing, rather against inability to apply a carefully worked out routine, rather against the *lack* of technique, than against either or both as "bad" things to be ignored or forgotten.

But who am I to stray into the fields of controversy? I must back to my cage as befits one who huffs and puffs against houses built of bulletins.

If there were book lists to sell, what would you buy? Some cost a passing bell, some far more than a light sigh, and a number shake from my crown about half a bushel of grey hairs a month. But to heal *my* ill, I'd plump for the BG Books of 1936. No, sir, that BG is not a vulgarism, it is copied direct from the cover of *Bethnal Green's* annual *tour de force*. I don't much like this cover, and, generally speaking, I don't like annotations, yet, once again, confronted by these little essays (as someone else called them) appended to titles in the *Bethnal Green* list I am prepared to forget likes, dislikes, emotions, all this earthly moil, and stand as a yogi wrapped in contemplation of these manifestations of pure art. I'm not going into hyperbolical flights about this production. It's crazy; it's too expensive; the less said about its dictionary arrangement the better; it's immoral, it's rude, it sniggers. But I'm the body-slave of anyone who can show me its like.

A friendly letter from a member of the *Enoch Pratt Free Library's* staff brought me a number of book-lists produced by the Fine Arts Department of that institution. To the note about them in the *Wilson Bulletin* for last December I may add that they were made possible by a Carnegie grant. The note in the *Wilson Bulletin* referred to was somewhat reticent from the fact that Baltimore is responsible for the "Book-list forum" therein. I don't have to be shy. If you detest Americans, call them provincial boors. If at the same time you are quite normal, and are open to argument, take a glance at this work from Baltimore. You will at once

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realize that so far as a cosmopolitan outlook is concerned, we are beaten—beaten hopelessly. It is fair to us to note that specialists were consulted for the material of these book-lists, and we may even slap ourselves on the back because of the preponderance of English works. Nevertheless, it would appear that the American public is extremely hospitable to foreign cultural influences, while a consciousness of a place in international art is revealed here and there by keen self-criticism in annotations. The actual production of these book-lists is unspectacular. A sheet folded once or in three is the general form, with not more than thirty titles, an attractive feature of each being a line reproduction from a book appropriate to the subject treated. Critical and informative notes are employed besides specific annotations, and both bear the mark of broad scholarship.

I have received three junior library bulletins, from *Hendon*, *Gateshead*, and *Leeds*. The most noteworthy point is the scrapping of that dirty and old-fashioned line-block which has hitherto disfigured the cover of *Hendon's* "Magic casement." This publication has always been in the forefront of work produced for children, and in its new dress it gains an exterior distinction it should never have lacked. I observe that Miss Colwell has retained the set form of paragraphs relating to the care and handling of books, but *Lifebuoy*, *Lux*, and *Luxemburg* radio, *Rinso*, and "Night-starvation" have worked wonders at *Leeds*. "Are you John?" reads the title of a passionate article on the back page, which proceeds in the best style of the syndicated advertisements, and is in fact devoted to the necessity for children to wash before reading. There is a real heart-throb in the bit where John, overwhelmed by the malefactions of the disgusting Robert Wronguse, promises his dear old mother always to wash before "touching books again," and the final paragraph is a set-off to the life of the I.B.C. announcers. Topical, interesting, and novel, but I have never been so much amused by a bulletin before. *Gateshead's* effort (another "Chimney corner" by the way) is in the infant stage, for this is only the second issue, but Miss Johnson, children's librarian and editor, seems already to have got going well. Stories and poems from child readers are encouraged, this number carrying a tale from a thirteen-year-old, which as an inveterate critic I should like to pick to pieces.

The Divisions

LIVERPOOL AND DISTRICT BRANCH

ABOUT sixty members were present at a meeting of the Branch, held at Wallasey on Friday, 12th March, by kind permission of the Chief Librarian, Mr. W. Wilson, F.L.A.

Mr. W. A. Phillips (Liverpool) opened a discussion on "The 1938 examination syllabus and the educational policy of the Library Association." The Elementary Section was covered by Miss F. M. Lythgoe (Liverpool), the Intermediate by Messrs. R. Bioletti (Liverpool) and J. C. Harrison (Liverpool), and the Final by Mr. F. Higenbottam (Bootle). The general impression given was that the speakers were in favour of the advent of the Syllabus, but were in doubt as to the merits of a number of the innovations.

The discussion ran on different lines. The younger members showed their teeth and the Syllabus was subjected to a fierce attack, particular attention being given to the Final Section. The proposal to increase the fees for second and further attempts was subject to a hail of abuse, and the temper of the audience can be gauged by the fact that a suggestion, that an examination be held on the Syllabus itself, was greeted with scornful applause. This, however, served to relieve the tension and peace was restored.

At the conclusion of the meeting votes of thanks were passed to Mr. Wilson and his staff, to the speakers, and to the Branch Social Committee for the catering arrangements.

NORTH-EASTERN DIVISION

The Annual Meeting of the Division was held at Newcastle-upon-Tyne on 26th March. It was well attended, about seventy members assembling in the Lecture Theatre of the Literary and Philosophical Society, where they were welcomed by T. M. Harbottle, Esq., M.C., Senior Secretary.

In the absence, through illness, of the Chairman (Miss W. C. Donkin), Mr. E. F. Patterson presided at the Annual Business Meeting. The Officers and Committee for the ensuing year were elected as follows: *Chairman*: Miss W. C. Donkin, F.L.A. (Armstrong College). *Vice-Chairman*: Mr. W. M. Martin, F.L.A. (Lit. & Phil.). *Hon. Treasurer*: Miss M. L. Coatsworth (Sunderland). *Hon. Secretary*: Mr. G. S. D. Lindsay, A.L.A. (Tynemouth). *Hon. Educational Secretary*: Mr. E. F. Patterson, A.L.A. (Armstrong College). *Committee*: Miss C. Ellis

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(Sunderland), Miss I. Little, B.A., F.L.A. (Northumberland County), Miss M. Lovell, B.A., F.L.A. (Durham County), Miss D. Thompson, F.L.A. (Wallsend), and Messrs. W. E. Hurford, A.L.A. (Newcastle), R. Muris (Newcastle), A. Rennie (Gateshead), and J. S. Swan (South Shields). *Divisional Representative* : Mr. G. S. D. Lindsay. *Representative to A.A.L. Annual Meeting* : Miss W. C. Donkin.

After the appointment, for an experimental period of one year, of a Junior Committee consisting of Miss M. S. Young, A.L.A., *Chairman* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Lit. & Phil.), Mr. C. Rodham, A.L.A., *Hon. Secretary* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne), Mr. J. R. Davidson (Durham County), Miss I. Ferrow (Blyth), Mr. W. R. Oldfield (Wallsend), Mr. E. F. Ferry (Gateshead), Mr. A. Donnelly (University Library, Durham), Mr. A. King (Tynemouth), Miss M. Schaeffer (Armstrong College), Miss J. G. Scurfield (Sunderland) had been approved, it was unanimously agreed, on the motion of Mr. Lindsay, that the best thanks of the Division be accorded to Mr. W. E. Hurford, the retiring Hon. Secretary, for his services to the Association.

The members thereupon adjourned to the County Hotel, where tea was served by the kind invitation of the Chairman and Committee of the Literary and Philosophical Society. After tea members had an opportunity of inspecting both the Library of the "Lit. & Phil." and the Northern Regional Library Bureau, and at 6.30 p.m. the evening session began in the Lecture Theatre.

Mr. M. C. Pottinger, F.L.A. (Librarian, Literary and Philosophical Society) presided, and the speaker was Dr. Cyril Jackson, Education Officer, B.B.C. (North-East Area), who addressed the members on "Co-operation between public libraries and the B.B.C." Dr. Jackson, in an interesting and somewhat provocative address, reasoned that as the educational sides of both broadcasting and librarianship were aiming at cultural improvement, they should, and could, co-operate to their mutual advantage; and in developing this theme the speaker instanced the various ways he thought this could be done. Mr. W. M. Martin opened the discussion, which proved to be the most lively the Division has had for some time. The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to Dr. Jackson, proposed by Mr. E. G. Hatton; and one to Mr. M. C. Pottinger and the Chairman and Committee of the Literary and Philosophical Society, proposed by Mr. W. E. Hurford.

Several reports are unavoidably held over.

The Library Assistant

Correspondence

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

GARENDON STREET BRANCH LIBRARY,
LEICESTER.

DEAR SIR,—

16th March, 1937.

The remarks of Mr. E. Hargreaves in your March issue describe only too accurately a type of tutor which unfortunately does exist, in spite of the system of editing of which Mr. Halliday makes so much. Indeed, his description of one tutor "who returns a student's paper with a bare mark . . . without comment, note, or advice" applies with such accuracy to an ex-tutor of mine that I cannot help feeling that Mr. Hargreaves and myself have at some time suffered under the same yoke.

My particular course consisted of a reading list garnished with excerpts from text-books, and was very definitely of the "scissors-and-paste" variety, entirely unoriginal and uninspired. The system (*sic*) of marking has already been described. Such a course is practically valueless. It constitutes, moreover, a definite menace in that indifference on the part of the tutor is very likely to cause the student himself to become apathetic in his attitude towards his subject. Not all courses are as bad as this, fortunately. Another which I was taking simultaneously was so diametrically opposite that I find it difficult to imagine a better. It seems that before every course reaches the excellent standard of this latter a drastic process of weeding is necessary in the ranks of the tutors.

And, therefore, believing that criticism should be constructive as well as destructive, I am going to suggest that each student, at the end of his course, and *before the examination results are out*, should be written to by the A.A.L. with the object of finding out whether or not he is satisfied with the tuition he has received. If complaints are necessary, they should be made without compunction; an incompetent or indifferent tutor is a thorn in the side of our examination system and should be removed without delay; there are plenty of excellent people waiting to take his place.

Such a system would at least serve to keep some of our tutors on the qui vive. At present it appears that certain of them regard themselves as sinecurists of the first order. Yours faithfully, LAURENCE C. NEAL.

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

PUBLIC LIBRARY, EXETER.

23rd March, 1937.

DEAR SIR,—

May I be permitted to endorse certain of the statements made by Mr. Hargreaves in THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT for March.

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Mr. Hargreaves mentioned the tutor who returns a paper with a bare mark and no further comments. When taking a classification course my tutor seldom took the trouble to mark each question separately or to correct the errors in an answer. Throughout the course systematic criticism of individual answers was lacking.

Little guidance is given as to what should be read. *The Organization of knowledge in libraries*, by Bliss, although on the list of text-books, was never even mentioned by my tutor until I happened to quote from it, when the following remark was appended: "I am glad to see you have got Bliss. It is exceedingly difficult, and we may not agree altogether with his views, but they are well worth studying for the new aspect they give us of our subject." One would think that as this text-book is admitted by a tutor to be "exceedingly difficult," students would be given some guidance in reading it. Yet assistance was never given, and when taking a revision course another tutor said that he was not competent to say what parts should be read.

Moreover, it is not unknown for a tutor to be definitely misleading. One of the questions set in May 1936 was: "What is meant by the alternative location of classes? Give examples." Having answered this question on "alternative location of classes" my tutor sent back a "model" answer devoted solely to "broken order," and added the following note to my answer: "This is a much deeper interpretation of the question than is my own—shown in the model answers. Library terminology is so loose that I hesitate to dogmatize and say you are wrong, myself right." The examiners reporting on the May Examination said: "The failure of many candidates can be assigned to definite causes: Carelessness in reading the questions. In Question 3 many candidates have read 'alteration of classes' (broken order) instead of 'alternative location of classes.'"

Tutors say that the text-books are misleading on many points; the report of the examiners shows that tutors themselves also err. From what source, therefore, can the student expect to receive guidance?

In fairness I would add that there are many tutors who do mark papers conscientiously and systematically, and who indicate what portions of the text-books may be read with profit. After the facts I have enumerated, however, I feel that Mr. Halliday's assertion that "the system of editing ensures that every course is of a consistently high standard" is unwarranted.

Yours faithfully,
C. W. HUDDY.

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